




The Rhyme
of the
Rickshaman



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YORK UNIVERSITY

SEP 25 2001

EAST ASIAN STUDIES

SHANGHAI:
KELLY & WALSH, LTD.,
1927



The Rhyme of the Rickshaman

I. IN SHANGHAI.

I sing the ricksha coolie,
Who's such a good old sort,
(Although at times unruly
With strangers to the port);
And in all kinds of weather,
At early hours and late,
We two have been together
And shared (*pro. tem.*) one fate.

It's true his skin is yellow,
(I like the tint myself);
It's true the needy fellow
Seems sometimes keen on pelf;
But he might have robbed his neighbour,
Or lived by beggary,
Yet he elects to labour—
A boon to you and me.



A little rough, he's ready;
He always seems on tap;
Upon the whole, he's steady,
And seldom meets mishap;
He threads 'twixt tram and taxi,
Past barrow and past bus,
Making policemen waxy
And motor-drivers cuss.

He cares not! On he trundles,
A-smiling all the time;
He'll pull you and your bundles
A good way for a dime;
Arrived, his brows a-mopping,
He takes his fee, and lo!
He's off again, non-stopping,
With someone else in tow.



Good luck to you, O coolie!
Great China's lowly son,
May Heaven reward you duly
When Life's hard work is done;
For you might have robbed your neighbour
Or lived the beggar's way,
Yet you elect to labour—
A credit to Cathay.

II. UP COUNTRY.

Your rickshaman is mainly
Poorer than chapel mouse,
Homeless, half-clad; while, plainly,
Mousie has furs and house;
Yet—not to freeze your marrow—
Some enter rickshadom
Since the poor farm's too narrow
For all the mouths at home.



For quite the best of reasons,
 (As other streams are dried),
All through the quiet seasons
 The ricksha trade is plied;
Towards harvests, though, or seed-times,
 Home such a man will hie,
Or else his household's feed-times
 Will suffer by-and-by.

Behold the coolie packing
 His bundle small and neat;
A rain-coat won't be lacking,
 The outfit to complete;
His pals around him pressing,
 Wish him "I lu p'ing an,"*
That immemorial blessing
 On travelling Sons of Han.

*peace all the way.



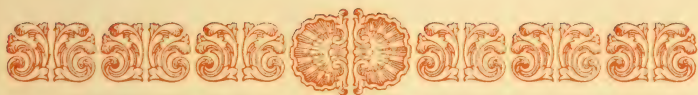
He goes by road or river
As ways and means dictate;
He dare not waste a stiver
For fear of rain or spate;
And if he's spent his money,
Or he feels so inclined,
He'll e'en take Shanks's pony,
Glad he's no 'fare' behind.

Past market-town and village
He goes with steady stride;
Through scenes of wondrous tillage,
His country's prop and pride;
No fear of motor breakdowns!
On, on, through thick and thin,
Finding o' nights his shakedown
In some poor rustic inn.



AH!! There's the well-known joss-house,
Still leaning crazy-wise,
(Not much above a doss-house
In *our* irreverent eyes);
And here's the pond immortal
He larked in as a boy;
And through his village portal
He goes, abrim with joy.

Our worthy son of Sinim
Before felt fit to drop;
But now new life's within him—
He sees his own roof-top;
No kin come forth to greet him,
The 'Welcome Home!' to speak;
For why? The time to meet him
They know not by a week.



Yet neighbour Chang, a-smiling,
Happens to come this way,
And the last lap beguiling,
Passes the time of day;
“Yes! All his folks are splendid;”
“Yes! Yes! The season’s late,”—
And lo! the journey’s ended,
The coolie’s at his gate.

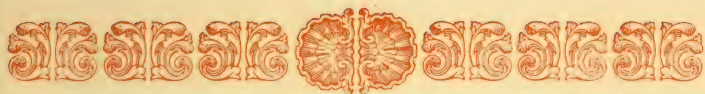
His father and his mother,
His wife, are all within;
Small sister and big brother
And odds and ends of kin;
New babe, perchance, with tassels
On scarlet cap, to view;
All English homes are castles—
The coolie’s be so too.



(Some hours elapse)

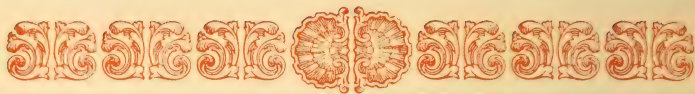
Hark! how they laugh and chatter,
 Though daylight's long since fled;
The time of night's no matter,
 For no one dreams of bed;
They're telling him who's married,
 And who is lying sick,
And who has corn half carried,
 And who played what mean trick;

And he tells them the glamour
 And grimness of Shanghai,
The crowding and the clamour,
 The prices soaring high;
How mean sometimes his 'fare' is;
 How dear his poor abode;
The foreigners' vagaries;
 The blaze of Nanking Road.



Old Puss sits by a-purring,
The dog lies at his feet;
It mayn't be very stirring,
But to his soul it's sweet;
And while his mother's petting,
And wife and weans are by,
Be sure he's not regretting
The glories of Shanghai.

The hearts that here are swelling
Beat just like yours and mine;
Above this humble dwelling
Hovers the Love Divine;
The scene is not for others;
Away we'd better come,
Glad (since we all are brothers),
The rickshaman's got home.



O coolie, live for ever!

But may there come a day

When want, from home, shall never

Drive such as you away;

When all the race called Yellow

Shall have enough in store,

And man shall use his fellow

In ricksha-shafts no more.

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